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ABSTRACT

Past attempts to clarify the status of school psychology and to set guidelines for its future development are reviewed. The continuing problem for school psychology is identified as a lack of success in causing a coordinated implementation of a broad role and function which would achieve a position of recognized importance and influence for school psychologists within the educational enterprise. New opportunities for the fulfillment of the potential in school psychology are discussed with emphasis on Public Law 93-380. The stipulations contained in 93-380 are discussed and are related to school psychology as a unique opportunity to wed the maturing of the specialty to this landmark legislation. (Author)

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School Psychology 1976: Old Froblems and New Opportunities

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It is difficult to point to a specific date, name or event as reflecting the precise moment when school psychology came into existence. Although school psychologists were employed long before World War II, the decade following the close of the war was witness to a burgeoning of demand and employment of psychologists in the schools.

Variation in training and function from school psychologist to school psychologist and from state to state, however, interfered with a crisp and clear definition of school psychology beyond the concept of "individual testing" of school aged children.

The steadily increasing demand for school psychologists and the prospect of a significant gearing up by training institutions to fill the growing gap between need and availability brought about the so-called Thayer Conference in 1954.

This national conference grappled with the important issues of the day for school psychology -- definition of role and function and training and qualifications needed. The conference brought forth certain results (Cutts, School Psychologists at Mid-Century, 1955, pages 30-31):

> The school psychologist is a psychologist with training and experience in education. He uses his specialized knowledge of assessment, learning, and interpersonal relationships to assist the school personnel to enrich the experience and growth of all children, and to recognize and deal with exceptional children.

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The school psychologist serves in an advisory capacity to school personnel and performs the following functions. 1. Measuring and interpreting the intellectual, social and emotional development in children. 2. Identifying exceptional children and collaborating in the planning of appropriate educational and social placements and programs. 3. Developing ways to facilitate the learning and adjustment of children. 4. Encouraging and initiating research, and helping to utilize research findings for the solution of school problems.

Two levels of functioning and training are recommended. The position of school psychologist involves such broad comprehensive preparation at a high level that these responsibilities can be met only with doctoral training or its equivalent. This training should consist of four years of graduate study, one of which should be a year of internship. The position of psychological examiner is considered essential. The training for this position should be a two-year graduate program, of which one-half year should be an internship. Such training should equip the examiner to perform many psychological services.

These ideas seem now to be as clear and serviceable as surely they did at the time of their pronouncement. Yet ten years later at the next national conference of school psychology, entitled New Directions in School Psychology, both trainers and consumers of school psychologists emphasized the need to change the image and function of the school psychologist. The point of view among those who attended the 1964 conference was that the practice of the school psychologist was that of a clinically oriented technician whose basic function was differential diagnosis of learning problems of individual children. School psychologists were seen as

reactors to specific, existant problems.

In considering change, those attending the conference predicted future trends in school psychology: 1. Research activity would become a larger part of training and practice; 2. Primary prevention would become the emphasis; 3. Consultation, in-service training and program planning would expand; and 4. Psychometrics would fade to lesser importance.

The conference voiced concerns about the lack of an unambiguous model for training, the need for standard qualifications for practice, the problem of educators accepting a broader role for school psychologists, the matter of recognition and support within organized psychology and the haunting issue of uncertain definition of psychological services in the schools.

Finally, in articulating the conclusions and recommendations of the conference, Bardon (Journal of School Psychology, 3-2, 1965, pages 6-14) emphasized the need for rather intensive self study aimed at resolving continuing concerns so that school psychology would remain useful and perhaps develop into an important contributor to the changing educational scene.

A formal self-study of national scope was undertaken in 1970-71 under the title, National Survey of School Psychologists. Conducted by Farling and Hoedt and supported largely by a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, the comprehensive study involved over 3,000 individual responses and reported, in part, the following. Individual child study, preparation of written reports and parent-teacher conferences constituted, in essence, the practice of school psychology. The majority of school psychologists were sub-doctorally trained. There was general dissatisfaction with the actual role and function of the school psychologist and a general feeling that the specialty had an uncertain professional identity. The delineation of an ideal or model role and function was considered to be the specialty's priority need.

Counseling, program planning, intervention, behavioral management and consultation were identified as important activities in a projection of the ideal role and function of a school psychologist. Pre-service and in-service training in these areas needed to be expanded. Licensing, certification and the public image of the school psychologist were also highlighted as important areas for study, goal setting and implementation planning.

All three of these attempts to clarify the status of school psychology and set guidelines for the future development of the specialty, occuring at intervals over nearly twenty years' time, spoke of the dissatisfaction and inadequacy of a narrow (largely psychometric) concept of service in the schools. Both of the conferences and the survey-study outlined much broader potential for the practice of school psychology involving prevention-intervention, consultation, counseling, program planning, and research.

Now, more than twenty years after the Thayer Conference, there appears to be some evidence around the country that a beginning has taken place in changing and expanding the role and function of the school psychologist. As has been characteristic of the history of the specialty, however, the changes are spotty, local and partial. The continuing problem for school psychology in general has been a lack of success in causing a coordinated implementation of a broader and more substantial role and function which would achieve a position of recognized importance and influence for school psychologists within the educational enterprise. Related problems include bringing about a concensus and a commitment among training institutions as to a standard training model based on a set of agreed upon qualifications for practice.

New opportunities of national scope are, and will be, presenting themselves as vehicles for the fulfillment of the potential in school psychology. The most

striking opportunity currently on the scene is Public Law 93-380 and the companion appropriation bill 94-142 which amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title VI, Part B, known as the Education of the Handicapped Provision. Public Law 93-380 has fully established the federal government's active participation in the development of educational programs for the handicapped. Called a major breakthrough and the Bill of Rights for handicapped children and youth, 93-380 "lays the foundation for the development of a national educational program for handicapped children which overrides deficiencies and discrimination against handicapped children which have been practiced by most states to varying degrees for well over two hundred years" according to Bonham (Focus on Exceptional Children, 7-4, 9-75). The individual states are currently involved in planning for compliance with the Law and will be implementing their plans over the next few years.

The Law requires that each state in the Union must adhere to certain stipulations in order to qualify for federal funds which will be earmarked for support to comprehensive programs meeting the needs of handicapped children, including those of pre-school age, in both public and private schools or care facilities.

The federal stipulations include the following:

1. Provision of full educational opportunities to all handicapped children: (a) school-aged currently receiving no education; (b) handicapped currently enrolled in regular school programs but who are receiving no special educational services; (c) handicapped children who are currently enrolled in a special education program but the program is inappropriate, incomplete or unnecessarily restrictive.
2. Procedural safeguards to insure that handicapped children and their parents or guardians are involved in decisions regarding identification, evaluation

and educational placement; (a) prior notice to parents or guardians when a state or local agency proposes to change the educational placement of the child; (b) opportunity for the parent or guardian to obtain an impartial hearing, examine all relevant records regarding the classification or educational placement of the child and to obtain independent evaluation of the child if desired; (c) protection of the rights of a child (when parents or guardians are not known) through appointment of a parent surrogate; (d) assurance that the decisions resulting from an impartial hearing are binding on all parties subject only to appropriate administrative or judicial appeal.

3. Testing and evaluation materials and procedures used in classifying and placing children must be selected and administered so as not to be racially or culturally discriminatory; (a) procedures shall be multi-factored and include the assessment of achievement, adjustment and social adaptability including criterion referenced tests and behavioral observations; (b) there shall be provisions for reevaluation; (c) there shall be a continuing process of information updates and in-service for special educators regarding assessment, information, techniques and skills.
4. Education of the handicapped must take place with the non-handicapped to the maximum extent appropriate. Removal of a handicapped child from the regular educational environment should occur only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that regular class placement with the aid of supplemental services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Segregation can occur only if real benefit is to be obtained. The decision of placement is to be made in terms of the least restrictive alternative.

5. Confidentiality is to be protected (the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act is included in Public Law 93-380). Essentially it establishes the rights of the family to have access to official records directly related to its child and to challenge such records on the basis that they are inaccurate or inappropriate. Written consent of parents or guardians must be obtained prior to releasing personally identifiable information to others.

A comparison of the requirements of Public Law 93-380 and the projected characteristics of the ideal, or potential role of the school psychologist suggests the existence of a unique opportunity to wed the maturing of the specialty to the successful implementation of landmark federal legislation. Unfortunately, school psychology was not written into the Law but the current nature and experience of the specialty indicates that school psychologists are particularly suited to carry the primary professional responsibility for local adherence to Public Law 93-380.

No other person on the educational scene is more qualified than the school psychologist to lead the school district in its compliance to the state plan built upon Public Law 93-380 (excepting, possibly, directors of special education where they exist).

Public Law 93-380 calls for the types of professional skills associated with the best practice of school psychology; individual assessment, problem identification, case management and coordination, program prescriptions and interventional procedures, program planning and evaluation, consultation and in-service training, parental counseling, confidentiality and due process, and child advocacy. And Public Law 93-380 offers direct development and expansion of school psychological services through the concept of least restrictive placement--comprehensive alternatives leading to the need for research and demonstration projects and new service systems to the handicapped. The inclusion of pre-school age children for service

also leads to the need for the development of early measures of prevention.

The references in the Law to independent educational evaluation, should the parents desire it, and the application of all provisions of the Law to private institutions and facilities suggest the possibility of the first important impetus toward private practice for school psychologists.

Right now every school psychologist in the country should take it upon him or herself to become as thoroughly knowledgeable about Public Law 93-380 (and 94-142) as possible. Every school psychologist should be discussing the probable effect of 93-380 on respective school districts with local school officials. State school psychology associations, and most particularly their leaders, should be meeting with state departments of special education giving input to the state plan for education of the handicapped and articulating the critical contributions to be made by school psychologists.

In general, the professional specialty of school psychology should be fully preparing itself to be at the ready to implement every detail of Public Law 93-380 and the professional associations at every level should be focusing their meeting, seminar and publication content on this goal.

Finally, the directors of university training programs should be examining program requirements vis-a-vis the qualifications needed by school psychologists to provide full and quality service in meeting every provision of 93-380.

Public Law 93-380 offers an extraordinary opportunity for school psychology to fulfill its long declared potential while at the same time making significant service contributions to the needs of handicapped persons, the rights of all children and the improvement of the educational enterprise.

Other opportunities may come in the future but they will have less immediate prospects for school psychology. Family services legislation and the rapidly growing areas of community psychology hold out possibilities of school psychology involvement. National health legislation will, no doubt, eventually include psychology and since the definition of a health service provider in psychology accommodates school psychology, opportunities for service and development may occur for the specialty in this area.

In any case, the professional specialty of school psychology must be alert to developments in areas where broader professional service can be rendered--and be ready to act with informed dispatch.